

Appendix H

David Belton- Executive Producer- Lost Worlds: Deeper into the Black Sea (BSMAP Documentary)

Q1

Danielle Newman: David thank you very much for taking the time to let me interview. Can you tell me a little bit about your background and how you became involved in this project?

David Belton: Yes, so my name is David Belton and I'm a director writer and producer of documentary film both for the cinema and television. I've also directed and produced drama. I spent the first 15 years or so years of my life at the BBC, where I was a graduate trainee. I started Newsnight and then moved to the documentary, working for current affairs, arts, history and science programmes. I then got into drama and made a feature film and wrote various of the dramas and then left the BBC in 2007 and become a freelance filmmaker. I worked for four years in the United States, where I work for PBS and then came back in 2011 and carried on my life as a freelance filmmaker. I heard about this project (BSMAP) through Ed Parker, who is an old friend of mine, and have become involved in this and thought EFFE should have a film made about the expedition...and he (Ed Parker) suggested that I should at least try and pitched the board so that's what I did. That's when I ring up Andy Byatt, who I knew a bit and said Andy I do things on the ground and you do things underwater I think we are natural team. And he said yes so, he came on board. I have no doubt that Andy's experience making Blue Planet means that he knew what was needed in terms of producing something underwater of quality, which was the absolute critical part of making the board understand if they were going to make a documentary what was required.

Q2

DN: That place neatly into my next question which is how do the challenges of accessing the maritime environment change how you tell a story?

DB: Well there was a practical side to it which was something new to me. It's immensely complicated the film underwater, in terms of the technical requirement and the safety requirements. Just filling out a hazard form is an immensely long and complicated process to make sure that we are secure and that the insurance is there and everyone is happy about the way we are doing it. So there is technically a side of it that you can't underestimate and with that comes expense. So that was a real shock to me, as someone who has made 3 million pound dramas and £50,000 documentaries, to suddenly find that for a documentary you are sort of moving into the drama territory in terms of budget. Just because of the amount of time and equipment that was needed and the amount of preparation. So I was kind of surprised about that. Sort of the first most notable thing was how you spend the money and how much more money you need to spend. I suppose as a filmmaker, the critical thing that you don't have underwater and the thing that makes for both filming both challenging and really interesting, is you can't hear anything. And of course we all know that, everyone who's watch Blue Planet and seen all of these beautiful

commentary and then you hear David Attenborough's commentary, his syrupy voice coming in, telling you the jellyfish has travelled 12000 miles and because of that you feel emotionally connected to that thing. During the process of making the film you have to be much more focused and much clearer about what and when things are happening and what you want the film. Because you can't rely on what people are saying. So you lose 1 whole dimension of film and so you really are required to tell the story visually. The interesting thing for me was watching a documentary filmmaker like Andy storytelling, and he will say this I'm sure, is that it's about finding the epic thing that you want to film and then filming the epic thing and afterwards to work out what the story is. So the wildebeest travel and they don't talk to you and you don't talk to them. They go across the Savannah and they get to the waterfall...it's amazing the crocodile leaps out and grabs the wildebeest you had your climactic moment and you can have your story laid out in front of you. We didn't necessarily have that. We just had a bunch of people watching a television screen and a large heavy object disappearing down to the depths of the water to look at some wet wood. You therefore have to be really really clever and careful about what you film because the underwater sequences are going to help you build your story. You can't just say there's the ROV, you have to really work out how you build tension and how you tell an unfolding story. It's always about the story for me. It's always going to be more about the story than about the spectacle. Spectacles are fine, it's good to look at things that are amazing, but you can only look at that once or twice and once you look at that really who cares if the killer whale jumps out and eats the seal it doesn't matter. I don't need to see that three times. Natural history believe that you can watch it 8 times but I don't agree. I have no patience for that, so for me it's always about how you tell that story. The interesting thing has always been how Andy and my instincts combined together to tell that story underwater and make it a series of slow reveals. But it does make challenging.

Q3

DN: So can you tell me a bit about how you decide what story you are going to tell?

DB: In the end for this film we are driven by what the scientists doing. We are driven by what Jon (Adams) was doing and I think we were beholden by what the expedition was doing to make sure that we covered it. In a way, with them 24/7 a lot of the time because we felt we had to because you never knew what you were going to find. So part of it was driven by the fact that you never knew what was around the corner and you would better be filming because it could be amazing. But there were other times when we tried as much as possible to make specific choices about what we were filming and really that's about having your eyes and ears open to the story that might be unfolding. And that's about having a relationship with people you're filming and that been close enough for them to reveal and talk about what it is they are doing. And that was the biggest challenge that we faced and the most difficult thing that we faced.

Q4

DN: Did you find that the relationship progressed over the three years that you spent on the project?

DB: Well I wasn't there for 2015 but Andy, he was there and he would give you a different perspective. From my point of view, and I know this from Andy and Tim and Hugo who were there in 2015, there was a certain amount of mistrust about us from the beginning. That was based partly on people's experience of working with television productions in the past, it was partly by what they watched, was partly by just ignorance of what we did. I think there was a feeling and I think that feeling lessened. The trust slowly grew but by god it was hard work! Because in a way we seem to be working incredibly hard to make the science team understand that this was a collaborative experience but it was our job to accurately reflect what was going on. And that was a real tension because... would Jon have argued to have this film to have his project documented if it had been up to him? You'd have to ask him that but my guess is not. Certainly not if he'd been asked in 2015. But I sense that because of the collaboration, because we were told that this was a documentary and that science was going to work with us this was effectively a forced marriage it became a good marriage. There was certainly attraction on our part, we definitely fancied science, but we knew that science didn't fancy as much. But I think that over a year or two they started seeing some of our more attractive qualities. They saw that we were that we had integrity and we were immensely hard-working and wanted to do a really good job. Also that we were bringing a whole bunch of things into the project they haven't thought of before. Andy was instrumental of that in terms of his understanding of what could be done underwater and filming. So I think that there was a mutual trust that grew and I think by 2017 everyone was in a very good place about what we were doing. Jon made a point of that by saying I think we're a collaboration. But you only have to go back to the very beginning of it, if you've been told that this is the way it's going to be and you are going to define the relationship that is the way it's going to be. It meant that in the end, the science team were more careful about what they told to us. It meant that in the end some of the stories that I wanted to tell, some of the things that I sensed were around were off limits. People wouldn't talk to me about them and they worried that if they did talk about it in some way it would compromise their science and the expedition. They worried they would be exposed on television, no matter how many times I said look that's not what I'm doing I'm just trying to tell the most compelling story they didn't necessarily believe or trust that completely. Now if Jon had said to me in 2015, I want you to come on board it would have been a different relationship then. And then if he decides to not reveal certain things to us at certain points and I looked through his door said "no no no that's not the deal you asked us to come so you have to be open otherwise this is not working". But that wasn't the relationship that wasn't how it was constructed. So in a way we never could and we never did complain we always pushed and said "come on it's alright." We could never make a formal complaint or anything like that nor did we want to because we always knew that this was something that had been asked of him, and he had agreed to rather than something that had come from him. This is all quite open, I'm being very open here so I don't know when your PhD is being published and I don't mind I had no problems with anything I'm saying but you're getting warts and all here.

DN: Thanks, that's exactly what I want. It's quite illuminating to hear the other side of the story, as it were.

DB: Who knows what you were just saying about us. *laughter* I suppose, two point of all that that whole long-winded story, is to say that understanding the terms of the relationship

at the very beginning is so important in understanding what sort of film you're going to get in the end. Now I'm working really hard to find the narrative, to do what storytellers really want to do which is to put people through highs and lows and build to a fantastic conclusion. That's what I want to do that's what the expedition did. They ended up 4 days before the end finding a shipwreck of such staggering importance and quality. That's our story: it's a quest and bingo they've got it. So we need to tell that. But the stories I love do that. It's like I tease Jon when I say stories are like that, like the oscillating Black Sea. In a sense that's my job. There are times when it has been frustrating for us through the three years when we weren't able to really mine those moments, the highs and the lows that were there and that were part of the expedition. Because we were being managed through that and away from it at certain points. Everything was good, everything was great and not everything was great. We didn't want to make some sort of docusoap that was saying oh Rodrigo's gotten out of bed the wrong side and he's feeling a bit grumpy or Jon has stubbed his toe and is pissed off with Kroum. It wasn't like that, it was what are the tensions and pressures of all of these people as they try and achieve what they are trying to achieve. And those are the things that the team was careful to protect...I'm banging on about this

Q5

DN: No no! How do you think the public's fascination with treasure hunting influence how documentaries talk about maritime heritage?

DB: We never talk about treasure. I don't think the word treasure ever appears in conversation in Black Sea films in any of the three years. The answer is no. But what we all understand is that story is fundamentally about Quest. This is a quest. Science is about questing and finding answers. In a way the treasure of the whole thing is wrecks, where we believe it is critical for an audience to engage with. We know that if an audience is to engage with Black Sea Map it needs to have tactile evidence of the past. And mud is not it. We all know that and broadcasters have made that very clear to us. In a way, we always knew that. We wanted to be able to find things, just like Jon wanted to find things. We all know that Jon wanted to do that desperately. There weren't too many geologists onboard Havilla. So in a sense we were all colluding on the same idea, which was to find things and search and recover things and that's because audiences, they don't need to see something shiny but they need to find and see revelation and I think it's more about revelation than about treasure. One wreck is as interesting as another to an audience and so our job is to work each wreck differently, to give a different reveal because that is what audiences want. They don't want the same thing. I think that's the sense of how I feel.

Q6

DN: Do you think there is still a public appetite for truth-based heritage and documentaries?

DB: Huge. Absolutely huge. I think the people are rooted in the idea of story-based history and what it can tell us about ourselves I really do I think so. Everyone thought that actual television would disappear years and years ago but look it's all still happening. We will be in San Francisco at the end of this month talking about this film that the world congress of specialist factual producers. It's a bun fight for three days in an enormous hotel with

hundreds and hundreds of broadcasters who are all absolutely desperate for factual content. Netflix and Amazon Prime are two huge new distribution forms, and of course they are producing dramas, but they are also wanting huge amount of factual content. People are big consumers of it. We can all talk about fake news and things like that but the very fact that you have someone setting up the fact that there is fake news suggests that there is a demand for what is real. I think it's never been stronger in one sense and television has never been stronger in one sense.

Q7

DN: Do you think the documentary is one way of changing the perception of maritime heritage and the maritime world?

DB: I'd say they are interesting but less so then before. I mean I think they are wonderful, but I just look at my kids and the way they consume and the opportunity of different media platforms to exist and for people to engage with material. And I think everyone in the documentary world needs to be really alive and sensitive to the fact that it is all changing out there. People are consuming their media in different ways and we need to be very sensitive and alive to that. Se we are going to this conference, this congress every year in San Francisco and we are going to the VR summit here in London just around the corner in December because we sense that's where there is an enormous potential for young people to engage with material. It's still very raw and no one knows how it's going to work or how we are going to access it or all the rest of it. But this maritime project is a perfect example. Look in front of us (gesturing to 3D print), with all of the data you've produced this amazing virtual reality experience for young people or students to engage with in a way whereby they relate to it and engage with it and interact with it and find out stuff. So I think that sort of consumption of fact and evidence is going to come from different ways other than simply sitting on the sofa with Mum and Dad watching television. I think the documentary has a place still and it still has in many ways a banner place with the metaphorical front of cinema sort of thing. The documentary has that sense of 3 years of the making. There is an unbelievable integrity with filmmakers, with people who have devoted far too much time in edit suite and not enough time with their families working unbelievably hard on something that they care about. And that's all really, really important but we all know that. If we are smart we all know that the world is spinning round and information is everywhere in terms of the web, television, streaming, blogging all forms of virtual reality or whatever. That all is existing and we need to be alive to it. We are working really hard to come up with an educational program which is a mixture of who knows what, bit visual effects, a bit of film, a bit of video of information, that's a tool for teachers to take into the classroom. Now when I was 16 you got one of those really stupid and boring National Geographic films which lasted for an hour and was brilliant because the teacher will turn the lights off and we will all go to sleep for an hour. In a way we are in a world that is much more susceptible to new ideas and that means the documentary has to find and turn it right to be there rather than to simply say we've always been here and we deserve to be here. We have to fight for it.

Q8

DN: How do you think the practicalities of this project how was funded, the fact we had three teams, the fact it was multi-year, how do you think that is affected the outcome of the documentary?

DB: I think it's made it much better. We all want films that deepen our understanding of something and in the way it's a bit like one of those ice cores that people take to find out about global warming. The core into the ice and pull it out and you'll see the sediments and the different layers of ice. If you are across three years you are able to deepen into a subject. You are not widening it, you were deepening it and the deeper you go into a story at the deeper you understand it and the deeper you understand the human characters and qualities of those people. The greater the sense of trust that is developed and the greatest sense of collaboration and teamwork. So in a way, what you get is something that is much closer to the actual experience and something that is more integrity and more sense of why people are interested in the past and why do they do these things and why should we care. So that 3-year thing gives you that and also means that when you have a science and education documentary you can work together and it's 3 years means that trust is developed. You learn more, I mean you learn much more about yourself as well about what you can deliver to the other teams and those links them bonds become stronger. That said I would also caution, which is that one of the things that you should always do as a documentary filmmaker is retain a degree of objectivity, and the natural instinct of that same natural history is to all be collaborative and collude together all the time. Because you are all trying to find a way to work together. Where I come from as a former journalist and a documentary maker, I want to know what people are really like I want the story to reveal them, not them as characters. Now if you are totally embedded and you were seen wearing the same shirt with same brand on it you can get into dangerous territory. I remember making a series about young kids joining the army and I was quite new into making documentaries and I was making Newslines, so I had been making short term films. Two weeks here and two weeks there. But this was going to be 7 months with the squad of kids, following them as they became soldiers. I remember coming back to the studio and" saying they've got a mile and a half challenge in two weeks time where they have to run a mile and a half they've got to do it in under 7 and a half minutes. If they do that they pass if they don't they get thrown out" and I said to my boss I think I'm going to run it with them because they'll see that I'm sort of part... and she said don't. . don't run it. you're not one of them you're a filmmaker and your job is to find out about them not to be with them. You don't get drunk with them, you don't run with them. You are different and they will love you and I'll get to know you anyway. But you have to have that objectivity. And so I think that's the note of caution always, and therefore for producing quality heritage broadcasting it's about the degree of trust you have with the people who are making a film about. Whereby they know David is making a film about us, he's not one of us but we trust him. We are going to come out well and we're going to come out truthfully. It is going to be a truthful reckoning of what's happening.

Q9

DN: Ultimately who do you think that you work for the public or the scientists?

DB: Definitely the public. Absolutely. If it was the other way around I couldn't live with myself. I think I wouldn't take a job like that. All my instincts created in my last 25 years as a filmmaker would advise me against taking a job where I felt I was duty bound to honour a principal ideal rather than to reflect about what really went on. There are guys that do that, they make really polished and excellent corporate videos and if they wanted that then they could have asked for that. But they saw my CV and they saw that I was the person who asked annoying questions. Ask Jon, he'll tell you the man never stops asking me annoying questions. He knows that. And I think Jon's grateful for that. Because he knows he's being tested and as long as he knows that he's been tested fairly he gets the sense that the relationship is alive and it's constantly moving and shifting. But it's done with an understanding of what each has doing.

Q10

DN: Why do you think we make documentaries?

DB: Because we love stories and we want to tell stories. Because when we were young, if we had parents who were thoughtful and had time, they stayed up and told us stories. We desire and want to find things out and we want to know what's going to happen. We want to find out a bit more about ourselves and how we feel about something and why we feel that way. We are driven by a desire for stories and I don't think that this project is any different. We are cutting sequences right now which are watching the scientists watching the Roman wreck and they are children. They are staring at the screens and they can't talk. It's a truthful moment because Rodrigo can tell you a thousand times why archaeology is important and he does do it very eloquently but I've got a shot of him looking at the Roman wreck and it tells you everything about why he's an archaeologist. So we like telling stories.

Q11

DN: So now we move onto the blue sky thinking aspect of it. If you could film a maritime documentary on heritage without any concerns about the mitigating issues, for example budget or time scale, what story would you tell? and why?

DB: You know the sea is so riveting because of the sense of unnatural. So I think I'd want the film something with a very clear sense of mystery. I think Black Sea has some of that. I suppose the thing that would be really interesting for me would be, and it's born out of what we've done, would be the focus on human ingenuity combined with the deep desire to understand finds. It makes me want to film something which combines both. The desire for a quest, the desire to uncover a mystery. I would love to have that to combine with some extraordinary technological feat that allowed us to uncover or reveal the secrets of whatever. So I think what I'm probably saying is that I would love to raise a wreck because I think in a way. As much as the 3D prints are wonderful and the photogrammetry is wonderful, the tactile quality, which goes back to what Jon said, you know about diving and holding things. The tactile quality of seeing the past and holding the past and being part of the past and seeing how you can possibly do that. We can land on the moon we can raise the Mary Rose, can we raise a Roman wreck? And I think that would be an

extraordinary combination of finding it, revealing it, and raising it would sort of encapsulate for anybody who wants to understand heritage and human condition. It tells us one, a desire to understand the past and two, our brilliance and our ability to do something incredible. So that would be pretty good. I'd need about 5 million. Because then we could raise it, over about 4 years, and we build it and put it in a dock somewhere in Bulgaria and go look here is the past.

DN: Well that is in the last question. Have you got anything you want to add? or anything you think I've missed

DB: I'm not sure I don't feel like I've answered some of them particularly well.

DN: that's ok because I'm not far away so I can always nip down

DB: that's great maybe when you have it transcribed you could pick it back to me along with the questions. I think there was one I thought was a very good question and I rather skirted around it. Some I definitely headed straight into.